

CULTURE &amp; HISTORY DIGITAL JOURNAL 9(2)

December 2020, e014

eISSN 2253-797X

doi: <https://doi.org/10.3989/chdj.2020.014>

# Power through Language, the Language of Power: Equatoguinean *Emixiles* Facing *Lingua Franca*

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Submitted: 30 January 2020. Accepted: 2 July 2020

**ABSTRACT:** In 1968 Equatorial Guinea became independent from Spain but inherited its cultural architecture. Current identity claims made by Equatoguinean *emixiles* (Ugarte's term, 2010) are rooted in the social and territorial exclusion suffered by ethnic groups during their colonial past. In this paper I will explore the role that the Spanish language played in the identity construction of six Equatoguinean *emixiles* living in the city of Alicante (Spain). My interviewees' life-stories reveal valuable information on vernacular languages, but also on the *lingua franca*, a tool of liberation (granting access) but also of repression. By comparing their recollections of themselves (either as Guinean or ethnic citizens) back in Guinea, to their perceptions of themselves in Spain, I intend to delve into the mutual gaze between transnational identities (Vertovec) *here and there, now and then*. Given Bhabha's concept of "third space" I argue, using specific samples from my corpus, that the synchronic analysis of *emixiles'* discourses within a perverse diasporic perimeter (the land of the former colonisers), needs to be completed with the diachronic view of the patterns of power which influenced postcolonial (re)construction of national/ethnic identity.

**KEYWORDS:** Identity; Equatoguinean migration; Monolingualism; Ethnotypes; Memories; Dissidence.

**Citation / Cómo citar este artículo:** Iliescu-Gheorghiu, Catalina (2020) "Power through Language, the Language of Power: Equatoguinean *Emixiles* Facing *Lingua Franca*" *Culture & History Digital Journal*, 9 (2): e014. <https://doi.org/10.3989/chdj.2020.014>

**RESUMEN:** *El poder de la lengua, la lengua del poder: emixiliados ecuatoguineanos ante la lingua franca.* - En 1968 Guinea Ecuatorial se independizó de España, aunque heredó su arquitectura cultural. Las actuales reivindicaciones identitarias de los *emixiliados* ecuatoguineanos (término acuñado por Ugarte, 2010), tienen sus raíces en la exclusión territorial y social sufrida por los grupos étnicos a lo largo de su pasado colonial. En este trabajo se explora el papel desempeñado por la lengua española en la construcción identitaria de seis *emixiliados* ecuatoguineanos que viven en Alicante (España). Las historias de vida de estos informantes revelan datos valiosos sobre las lenguas vernáculas y la *lingua franca*, que era, a la vez, instrumento de liberación y de represión. Comparando sus memorias del tiempo vivido en el país de origen (en tanto que guineanos y miembros de las respectivas etnias) con las percepciones de sí mismos en España, este artículo indagará en la mirada refractada de las identidades *transnacionales* (Vertovec) del *aquí* y del *allí*, del *ahora* y del *entonces*. Esta mirada es posible dentro de lo que Bhabha llama "tercer espacio". Partiendo de este concepto y analizando los datos del corpus, este artículo avanza la idea de que el análisis sincrónico del discurso de los *emixiliados* (basado en testimonios extraídos del corpus de entrevistas) en un perímetro diaspórico perverso (la antigua metrópoli), ha de completarse con el escrutinio diacrónico de los patrones de poder que influyeron en la (re)construcción postcolonial de la identidad nacional/étnica.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Identidad; Migración ecuatoguineana; Monolingüismo; Etnotipos; Memoria; Disidencia.

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## INTRODUCTION

After the loss of other territories, Equatorial Guinea (EG) attracted the attention of Spanish authorities, especially during the first half of the 20th century. The pre-colonial public space, characterised by a diversity of representations in the political, legal, economic and social fields, was replaced by the metropolis' model of exploitation, which ignored local necessities and deprived ethnic groups of their sovereignty and essential role in politics and in territorial administration. Traditional society was dismantled, and the balance of power was broken, giving way to hegemonic foci and peripheral spaces, as Chiyé Kessé (2014, p. 115) shows. Campos (2002, p. 32) considers that Franco's colonialism is better understood as an unequal encounter between colonizer and colonized entailing mutations and concessions. The differences between the island (with Bubi peasants working on cocoa plantations and few settlers) and the inland (with the Fang population working in timber and a scattered Spanish presence) blurred when the Francoist regime intensified politically and economically its colonial activity and displaced administrators and guards to Equatorial Guinea. This territory raised interest among the Armed Forces, especially Navy, which shared authority with the Governor; the Church, with attributions in education and evangelisation (apart from the control it exerted over the people, replacing the State); and traders who saw the colony as a source of economic benefit. The Spanish language was both a differentiating element, as no other people spoke it on the African continent, and yet also a unifying one, although it suffocated ethnic languages. The "sacred civilizing mission" (Campos, 2002, p. 38), was the justification for the colonial action - the sole "means for Africans to reach common wellness" - and the recipe was acculturation, which, according to Chillida and Martín (2013, p. 413) was launched as a patriotic task (Christianisation and Hispanisation) and achieved through indirect government (indigenous chiefs). This change was noticeable in social dynamics.

Apart from the semi-autonomous peasantry and traditional chiefs, new categories arose such as the "emancipated" Fernandinos, mid-management administrators (graduated from the Higher Indigenous School of Santa Isabel), indigenous members of the Colonial Guard and Government Police, and the graduates from the Santa Isabel Seminar, who saw religious studies as a means of social ascension. Acculturation was accomplished through language, culture, religion, customs, doctrine and symbols. Chillida and Martín (2013, p. 428) point out that Equatoguineans were brought up to be Spanish, but were then excluded through such practices as segregation, discrimination and racial hierarchy. Not only was Spanish imposed on them, but also vernacular languages were forbidden. Public servants had to learn it or be dismissed. Foreign films were banned from 1936 and the toponymy was changed. Spanish traditions such as Epiphany were imposed against those autochthonous rituals, which were dismissed as "fetishist".

Regarding education, Negrín (2011, p. 114) shows that in 1887, responsibility was given to the Claretian Mission. The Second Republic introduced some progressive changes (hiring native teachers, introducing religious freedom), but as soon as Franco took office, new regulations imposed national-Catholicism as the reigning principle. During the first decade of the post-Civil War dictatorship (1939-49), primary school was universalized, and foundations were laid for the new leading classes. In the following period (1949-59), of developmentalism (in both the metropole and colony), the legal bases were set out for emancipation, on the grounds of a full "Hispanisation", catholic life and mastery of the Spanish language. Emancipation motivated a few of the population but alienated the majority. Between 1964-68 the highest budget (Negrín, 2011, p. 118) was spent on education in EG, which was granted an autonomous status in 1965, in response to anti-colonialist pressure, but this did not prevent the advent of independence in 1968 which gave way to a brutal dictatorship (unfortunately, not an atypical pattern in postcolonial Africa) led by Francisco Macías Ngnema (1970-1979). The decolonisation was not uniform, due to an uneven colonisation: foreign and Spanish investments, 20th century wars, Franco's autarchy and geographic and socio-cultural diversity, as Vilar (2005) shows. In terms of educational policies, independence represented a setback, under a regime that despised culture and destroyed the colonial teaching model without offering an alternative. According to Negrín (2011, p. 121), with Obiang in power, and in a context of ethnic clientelism, human rights infringement and corruption, the education system collapsed.

## EQUATOGUINEAN MIGRATION. MOTIVES AND PARTICULARITIES

During what was known as "the years of silence" (Ngom Fayé, 1999) there were clashes with the official "discurso Nguemista" a populist national exaltation based on false Marxist-Leninist ideals, and strong attacks against the colonial power as well as visceral threats against whites. Several Equatoguinean authors like Bolekia Boleká (2003) or Ndongo Bidyogo (1977), decry Spanish complicity with the Macías regime by means of the policy of "Materia Reservada" (Classified Information), which prevented Spaniards from learning about the atrocities committed by the bloody Macías regime. Finally, these horrific events gave rise to a coup led by his own nephew, Teodoro Obiang, a high official declared by his uncle a disloyal citizen in need of punishment. Obiang claimed he supported democratic change, but his regime (1979-present) soon turned out to be as oppressive as his uncle's and a new wave of exile and emigration began. Opponents and critics were imprisoned, tortured and executed. Despite the recent oil boom, EG still has a high rate of infant mortality, a scarcity of running water and, in some areas, of electricity, while Ugarte (2010, p. 28) warns that the pattern of jailing or exiling dissidents remains intact. Obiang expanded his loyalty base with the

PDGE (Democratic Party of EG) the main instrument for popular mobilisation, of which the vast majority of the population are formal members. As Okenve shows (2009, p. 151), PDGE affiliation is a requisite in order to work for any public or private company in the country. The new colonialists are the CEOs and personnel of the energy plants based in Texas, which have been set up in the country. On the other hand, Spain and France are also highly interested in Guinean oil profits and seem willing to turn a deaf ear to human rights abuses and to other ethical issues. EG is one of the poorest countries in Africa.

In 1968 Equatorial Guinea became independent from Spain but inherited much of its cultural structure. Current identity claims made by Equatoguinean *emixiles* (Ugarte's term, 2010, p. 2) are rooted in the social and territorial exclusion suffered by ethnic groups during their colonial past. Nowadays, according to Ondo *et al.* (2002, p. 107), there are about 200000 Equatoguineans living abroad.

Aixelà (2011, p. 12) divides the second half of twentieth century Equatoguinean migration into three stages, not necessarily successive. Apart from the "labour migration", which is a phenomenon of the eighties and nineties, when many Equatoguineans left in search of better salaries, and also many of them returned in a reversed flux after the discovery of oil, attracted by companies offering specific training and employments, Aixelà identifies at least two other major migration motives. One was the lack of university places which provoked the "educational migration" that started in the fifties and encouraged young people to head either to Spain (for those who could afford it) or to neighbouring states for those with fewer means. The other was the lack of freedom and rights that triggered the "exile migration", which also started in the fifties and overlapped at different times with the other two waves. In the educational migration an important role was played by religious institutions that offered grants. Spanish universities provided some added assistance, which as, Aixelà (2011, p. 15) shows, was insufficient since Equatoguineans still used "ecclesiastic channels" (that prioritized some ethnic groups over others), and "socio-political influences". She also concludes that emancipation was not decisive in their access to tuition abroad since, on the one hand, the Fernandinos already had this right and the rest of the black population, although emancipated *de iure* were not so, *de facto*. A real change though, took place with the derogation of the emancipation Law in 1960, when Equatoguineans received Spanish nationality and differences between white, black and autochthonous Spaniards (Ambö, Bubi, Fang and Ndowé) were blurred. As Negrín (2011, p. 113) shows, except for the periods in which EG had the status of a Spanish province (1959-64) and autonomous territory (1964-68), Equatoguineans received a paternalistic treatment by the colonial power, which exploited their riches and labour. The "exile migration" became an exodus in the seventies, after independence (Aixelà 2011, p. 27) when many dissidents (activists, opponents, intellectuals, even entrepreneurs) fled corruption and persecution. This is how edu-

cational migration became politicized. However, many of those who migrated to study in Spanish universities had to give up grants when President Macías decreed their homecoming because they were allegedly distancing themselves from their homeland and values. Those who decided otherwise were declared traitors and had their nationality withdrawn. Spain awarded them stateless status, which left this "lost generation" in a kind of legal vacuum.

Thus, in the seventies, not only the destination, but also the migrants' profile changed. This made Ugarte introduce the concept of "emixile" (2010, p. 2), a combination of exile and emigrant and argues that both terms overlap in this new world with blurred or no borders, which globalises dissidence and makes people flee from oppression. A term like *emixile* allows us to understand "all kinds of geographic departures of the modern and postmodern periods". In his opinion, Equatoguinean history "tells much about the self-conceptions of its former colonisers and the nation-state of Spain", but it also reveals interesting facts about "modern migrations, global material inequalities, personal stories of people forced to leave and of those who leave on their own accord, collective shifts of human beings from the native land of colonisation to other lands, often the land of the former colonisers and the physical, psychological, and intellectual exchanges that emerge as a result" (Ugarte, 2010, p. 3).

## COLONIALISM, IMAGOLGY AND LANGUAGE

In spite of the development of intercultural hermeneutics, imagology<sup>1</sup> still matters in the way national ideologies, cultural borders and ethnicity influence the contemporary identity politics of exclusionism and xenophobia, as Doorslaer *et al.* (2015) show. These authors also observe that although globalisation is a network designed to replace systems and nations, the way people frame realities cannot be ignored. Global networks do not solve the problems arisen from natural, linguistic or cultural borders and do not dissolve deeply rooted perceptions of others and ourselves. Globalisation emphasises present, instantaneous time (via unlimited connectedness but also imagological exposure), while the past (or the lack of knowledge of the past) has to do with image and stereotypes. One of the colonialist legacies common to the whole African continent has been the treatment of indigenous peoples as "special", pointing out differences, and as Bayly (2010, p. 248) shows, confronting agricultural and tribal peoples whose economic and cultural binds were ancient and subtle. This "divide and rule" policy was discussed also by Sá and Aixelà-Cabré (2013, p. 1). Stereotyping is seen by Bruti *et al.* (2014, p. 235) as a key discursive practice in the representation of ethnic and racial differences by means of the "language subordination principle" which regards the speech of ethnic groups as linguistically inferior to that of dominant groups<sup>2</sup>.

Starting from texts written by political agents whose mission was to colonize the territory, such as governors, Sá (2018, p. 103) shows how European colonial powers

organized, invented and recreated the Eurocentric collective memory, which clashed with the memories developed in Africa. Progress and civilization are central notions to justify inequalities and racism, a powerful imagological tool. Sá (2018, p. 109) argues that colonial differentiation is based on binary oppositions, creating power relations. Apart from race (associated with such vices as alcoholism or laziness), Francoism introduced a new discriminating element: the indigenous native as a *homo infantilis* (associated with peacefulness or timidity). Aixelà (2017, p. 26) shows that the Spanish authorities decided that the only option in Guinea was to convert and evangelize its “wild” and “infantile” peoples. Indigenous populations were not interlocutors, but passive, silent listeners that were to be “crystalized as barbarians” in need of salvation. And salvation came through work (mainly agricultural) and territorial control (preventing barbarians from becoming extinct because of their own weaknesses and lack of hygiene). Chillida (2017, p. 112) highlights the double image spread by what he calls “missionary racism” of the “indígena” as a savage *per se* (with no moral or social limits, sexually frenetic, even cannibalistic, as well as primitive, docile and naïve) and as a “Hispanicised” subject. As Said (1978, p. 51) pointed out, in reference to Orientalism (a set of European pre-existing ideas about Orient, reborn with Asian and African colonialism), the strength/superiority of the West and Orient’s weaknesses/inferiority as seen by the West are intrinsic to “any view that divides the world into large general divisions, entities that coexist in a state of tension produced by what is believed to be radical difference”. Bhabha’s (1994) critique of the colonial discourse warns against its production of knowledge to exercise surveillance and incite pleasure or displeasure. In turn, Chillida (2017, p. 109) observes, indigenous workers were both “used” and “priced” (in economic terms) in this “civilizing action” (that included measures to improve education and health), since its main objective was not wellness, but a better performance at work.

In turn Nerín (2009, pp. 25-26) brings into discussion the case of Gonzalo de Reparaz, a Spanish colonialist who wrote about what he called the “African vocation” of his country at the beginning of the twentieth century. Reparaz described the Bubi as a “lazy race”, Fernandinos as “apathic and libertine”, and the Annobonese as “pacifist and good-hearted”. From the Bubi perspective, the Fang are regarded as the “loyal and dark arm” of the colonialists since, as Sepa Bonaba (2011, pp. 113-114) shows, they were brought, trained and provided with weapons and privileges for this purpose. The Ndowe were seen as “sinister people” due to their hermetic night rituals. On the other hand, the Annobonese are thought to be the closest to the Bubi; both are islanders, and both share conditions of marginalisation, cultural values based on compassion and esteem, and their non-conflictive nature. However, Spanish colonisers were not free from *ethnotypes*<sup>3</sup> either; some of my interviewees<sup>4</sup> recall being told not to touch white people because it would bring death or that whites never went to the toilet since excrements were

an attribute of blacks. Both stereotypes (on behalf of the colonisers and the colonised), and ethnotypes, emitted by one ethnic group regarding another, still depend on certain measures and policies in the public sphere and also to the “collective imagination” of different groups. At different times, some researchers have tried to counter-argue ethnotypes through objective descriptions. Such is the case of a Claretian priest, Amador Martí de Molino, whose work describing the Bubi society during the colony is rigorous according to Sepa Bonaba (2011, p. 352) in terms of its time and purposes. However, it is not until the 21st century that Spanish researchers started massively focusing on Equatorial Guinea. For instance, the book by Aixelà-Cabrè (2011) describing the past and the present of Equatoguinean society. Also, using both current ethnographic material and documentary sources from the past (based on the rare accounts of travellers, missionaries or colonial administrators and isolated literary works), Fernández Moreno (2009) studied Bubi chiefdoms and kingdoms during the colonial period from a bifocal perspective and also their resistance to the colonial policy of evangelisation.

From a linguistic perspective, according to Junyent Figueras (2009, p. 156), Spain’s colonialist policy was assimilationist and based on exclusion (as well as the French or Portuguese models), imposing one prevalent language, in fact, the only permitted language in administration and education (accomplished through religion), was imposed to the detriment of the vernacular languages which were despised by the metropolis and eventually eliminated. In contrast, the British, German and Dutch colonial powers, equally assimilationist and dismissive towards vernacular languages, but not exclusive, did allow their colonised populations to use them in teaching, since they considered Africans unable to master the languages of the “white man”. They used interpreters, an option that stratified and segregated sections of the indigenous language speakers. Campos (2002, p. 38) shows that while Franco’s regime labelled the British colonial model as “differentiating” and the French as “assimilationist”, it defined its own model as “eclectic” on the grounds of its triadic nature. Indeed, the Spanish model conjugated three elements that worked as synonyms: Christianity, Hispanity and Civilization. However, as Chillida and Martín (2013, p. 420) point out, assuming the Spanish identity did not free the indigenous population (not even those emancipated) from a feeling of discrimination.

Research has been done so far in glottopolitics (Castillo-Rodriguez and Morgenthaler, 2016), in mutual dialectal influence, for instance Cuban loanwords in Equatoguinean Spanish (Castillo-Rodriguez, 2016) or in missionary linguistics (Castillo-Rodriguez, 2015), as well as in describing the Spanish language spoken in Equatorial Guinea (Quilis and Casado, 1995; Lipski, 2000; or Ngah Elingui, 2014, whose work focuses on linguistic policies). Other approaches dwell on the contradictions of the metropolitan official discourse regarding colonies (Zarandona, 2012) or linguistic identity (Chirila, 2015, in her MA thesis on diglossia and linguistic attitudes to-



wards Spanish). An inspiring book on the role played by intermediaries and clerks in colonial linguistic policies in Africa is edited by Lawrence et al. (2006). In the afterword, Klein (2006, p. 275) explains how traditional social control was eroded under the colonial rule by creating a system in which feudal chiefs preserved rule for the benefit of African elites in service of the colonial power structure. As several studies have been conducted on linguistic identity of the population in Equatorial Guinea, this paper seeks to complete the picture with impressions from exiles.

The two linguistic models, one related to direct colonialism (entirely assimilationist) and the other derived from indirect colonialism (allowing greater local autonomy) are quite similar; they both isolated most of the population and considered African languages inferior. This fact is explained by one of my interviewees, Jorge, in these terms: “Hablaban español en la escuela. Bubi solo en casa. Te colgaban un chaleco de conchas si hablabas bubi” (I used to speak Spanish at school. Bubi only at home. They would make you wear a waistcoat of shells if you spoke Bubi). This punishment is unfamiliar in Spain (where the more mythological “donkey ears” was used) but its symbolism, as a shameful punitive device, is perfectly clear.

Koskinen (2014, p. 483) shows that worldwide national authorities usually approach governing in multilingualism through one of the following four options: complete monolingualism; complete multilingualism; occasional translation combined with language learning provision; and a mixed model of multilingualism at a national level and monolingualism at a local level. An example of monolingualism is Equatorial Guinea under Spanish rule, and one of multilingualism, South Africa after Mandela’s constitution. However, Wallmach (2014, p. 575) deplores linguistic reality in South Africa: despite the announced “rainbowism”, English consolidated as the official *lingua franca* de facto, even if most of the state departments’ users are unable to access information in this language. Some of my Bubi interviewees complain not of Spanish as an administration language, but of Fang as being the language that many officials use when addressing any ethnic group who, not understanding it, are placed on an inferior position in front of the law.

## EMIXILES’ ETHNIC IDENTITIES AND *LINGUA FRANCA*

If language is important in any identity formation/preservation process, it is much more so in the case of oral cultures, in which language and especially “the spoken word” acquires the power similar to that of a notary document, as one of my interviewees (Viviana) recalls: “Las palabras poseen un gran poder y lo oral mucho más que lo escrito” (Words have great power and much more at the oral level than the written one). She further explains the ritualistic force of the spoken word. All the important moments in the communities’/family’s life are “sealed” orally through language, and my six interviewees share

this common knowledge and feel no need to mention it explicitly, except when they explain it to me, as in the case of Viviana. Like other colonisers’ languages, Spanish provided Equatoguineans belonging to different ethnic groups an instrument to communicate among themselves and externally with half of the world, but at the same time their ethnicity lost primacy (Joaquín says: “there are no defining elements for the Bubi culture anymore; colonialism always tries to destroy cultures. And it has managed to do so with the Bubis”). Lipski (2000, p. 11) refers to Equatorial Guinea as the only sub-Saharan Spanish-speaking nation, “which makes it somewhat of a linguistic curiosity and which has contributed to its political isolation from neighbouring countries”. Lipski believes that the role of a national ex-colonial language is significantly different in Equatorial Guinea from the one in most of English, French, and Portuguese speaking Africa. Equatorial Guinea is at the forefront of African nations which “have successfully implanted the former metropolitan language as an effective vehicle of national communication” (Lipski, 2000, p. 13) and he adds that Spanish is spoken spontaneously at home, usually in preference to indigenous languages or sometimes, freely mixed with them.

In the case of EG, the *lingua franca* policy has led to a paradox described by several authors, among whom, Ugarte (2010, p. 24) defines Spanish as the language of “home and not-home”. To him, it is “deeply ironic that the Spanish language will provide cohesion and an outlet for resistance, a language of multicultural exile”, in which the very discourse of vindication is articulated since it is the *lingua franca* for all the ethnic groups in EG. It is a tool of liberation and of “exploration of the double consciousness” (Ugarte, p. 29), but also the unicity among African nations (Lipski).

This paradoxical dual nature of Spanish as a language for resistance and cohesion has been influential in my six informants’ perceptions of themselves to such an extent that they unanimously admit feeling Spanish, not so much for their citizenship, but because of the language they speak. As Lipski (2000, p. 36) observed, Spanish is a “language closely tied to concepts of nationhood and self-identity”.

This pattern of power is still in force nowadays. One of the devices that globalisation uses to erase diversity is the *lingua franca*, the prerogatives of which are currently held by English on large surfaces of the globe. The presence of English in many areas of the globe as a common code is confirmed by authors such as Crystal (2009), Mackenzie (2014) and (Jenkins) 2018. English has consolidated its position due to a series of factors such as the colonial power of the British Empire, the role played by the United States in international business, research and politics, the expansion of audio-visual products in English and the promotion by institutions (e.g. British Council) as Ferguson shows (2007, p. 37). The term ELF (*English as a lingua franca*) was coined by Jenkins in the nineties and its interest has grown ever since (Jenkins, 2018, pp. 594-595). In this paper, I use the term *lingua*

*franca* as defined by Reithofer (2010, p. 144): “the term *lingua franca* is employed to describe an auxiliary language used between speakers of different first languages”, or

adopted by a speech community for such purposes as international communication, trade, or education, though only a minority of the community may use it as a mother tongue.

During colonialism, the languages of the metropolis were used as a *lingue francae* on the colonised territories for the same reasons. So, together with the “divide and rule” principle, a complementary one applies: “homogenize and rule”. In what follows I will try to verify if this is indeed the perception of my informants regarding Spanish in Equatorial Guinea and if so, what consequences the use of this *lingua franca* had on the process of identity-shaping of Equatoguineans belonging to different generations (who lived their childhood, adolescence or youth under the colonialist system) and to different ethnicities (Bubi, Fang, Annobonese, and Ndowe). The analysis is focused on two sets of questions extracted from the interview<sup>5</sup>. One set refers to how they saw themselves both in Spain when emigrating and afterwards (up to present days) and in their country before leaving it: as Equatoguineans, as an ethnic group or as Spanish citizens. The second set investigates the role played by the Spanish language and by their own vernacular languages in the shaping of their identities as members of an ethnic group, Equatoguinean society and emixiles in Spain. An interesting issue for further research is the use of Kiswahili as a “counter-lingua franca” in Africa and the motives for this widely spoken native language not becoming an alternative to colonial languages in Central West Africa.

In order to analyse their position towards language(s), first we need to gauge the proportion in which they see themselves as citizens of the former metropolis, of a country they left or an ethnicity in diaspora. Thus, **Emilio**, who is from Corisco, now retired and who used to work as a restaurant manager, says he feels neither migrant nor exile because he came to Spain to do the military service and decided to stay. He wanted to know the metropolis and Spanish priests helped him. Then he became involved in politics and became a leader of an opposition Guinean party in diaspora and he could never go back as he was denied access by the authorities. He tried to enter the country with a delegation of opposition leaders in 1979 and his visa application was rejected, so he went to Cameroon. But the delegates who went in, were later brought to trial by Obiang. He feels he belongs to his ethnic group (Ndowe) and he misses his island, he would return wholeheartedly. He considers each ethnic group to have its own status. In terms of character, Ndowe are similar to Bubis (peaceful) and different from Fang who are, according to him, impulsive, rebellious and unruly. On the other hand, **Jesús**, who is Fang and worked as an aviation assistant in Equatorial Guinea and as a butcher in a chicken farm in Spain, says that there is no better place to live for an

Equatoguinean than Spain. He deplores the fact that the vernacular language is disappearing and with it, identity is being lost by younger generations who do not speak Fang anymore neither in exile, nor within Equatorial Guinea (an opinion that Bubi interviewees do not share because for them, Fang is imposed on their ethnicity). He feels more Spanish than he feels Equatoguinean because of the way of living he adopted in Spain, which he would like to “export” to his own country and because Equatorial Guinea was the 53rd province of Spain, but he also feels Guinean because he was born there. He sees himself as an exile, since he did not plan to leave his country. He had to, due to lack of safety and freedom of expression. So, rather than from an intrinsic shift of identity occurred within the migration experience, his self-perception as a Spaniard comes from a feeling of admiration towards a lifestyle, unlike **Viviana** who is Bubi and considers dual nationality or dual identity a fallacy. She does not feel Spanish at all, although she has lived in Spain for over 30 years and she is a nurse in a public health centre. She feels Bubi first and then, Equatoguinean and African (in fact she belongs to an association of African women) since she considers that the race to which she belongs makes her a peer of other peoples on the continent, whereas the language she speaks (Spanish) is the common element that links her to other ethnic groups in her country. She also deplores the loss of identity taking place in Equatorial Guinea, a country that, in her opinion, wants to become “western” without belonging to the West. The two main causes leading to this loss are colonialism and the oil industry, an unaccomplished promise of progress in the case of the first and of wealth, in the case of the second. A Bubi also, **Juan** feels he is an exile, in spite of his position (civil servant in local administration) because he would like to return to his country and roots, but in a different way than he left, more freely. As he travels with a Spanish passport, he feels like an exile in Equatorial Guinea, but in Spain he feels he is an immigrant who is discriminated because of his skin colour. He has good relations with all the ethnic groups in the diaspora, but he asserts that with some groups (e.g. Fang) this would not be the case, if he lived in Equatorial Guinea. As Bubi, he has affinities with Annobonese and Ndowe. When asked which elements united Equatoguinean groups, he pointed to Spanish language first, then matriarchy, polygamy, and “the dowry”, therefore cultural customs and traditions shared by several ethnicities. However, when it comes to defining the Guinean culture, Juan believes there is no possible definition because dictatorships try to destroy ethnic cultures and in the case of the Bubi population, this aim was achieved. Colonisers want colonised people to lose their identity in order to be more easily subjected to the colonizing power. Thus, when asked about his identity, Juan says he feels neither Spanish, nor Guinean, but rather in between, which is more or less how **Rita** feels when defining herself as a product of cultural mixture. She is Annobonese and worked as a primary school teacher in her country and as a nanny in Spain. She recalls having had very good relations with Bubis at school

and student residences, and although this is the ethnic group with which she shares more affinities apart from her own, due to both being islanders, she confesses she has good relations with any Guinean and with Spaniards. In Spain, she watches Equatoguinean TV, and tries to be in contact with co-nationals to keep being informed. She feels recognised as Equatoguinean in Spain and she thinks that what defines Guinean culture is precisely the Spanish language, apart from certain social aspects. She sees herself as a migrant, not an exile, since she came to Spain for health reasons. Migration was not part of her plan and she did not choose the moment or the modality, but she did choose Spain. She considers identity to be defined by birthplace, and origins, and in her case, her Bantu ethnic roots determined her identity and culture. Otherwise, she regards herself as similar to the rest of Guineans. On the other hand, she sees herself like Spaniards only with different birthplaces and therefore, different opportunities. When asked to define herself, she places her Africanity in first place, then her Guinean and Annobonese self and only thirdly her Spanishness, owed to the language she speaks and to the “cultural mixture” she was raised with. Unlike Rita, **Jorge**, a Bubi trained as a draughtsman who works as airport staff in Alicante, recalls he was already aware of discrimination at the age of 14 when he left his boarding school in Malabo and went to Spain for high school. He wanted to become an architect, but he was not admitted because of the “*apátrida*” (stateless) condition decreed on expatriates. He also recalls his two expeditions (at the age of 9 and of 14) organised by the OJE<sup>6</sup> in the regions of Cuenca and Soria in Spain; on both occasions, he met Franco. In Spain he socialises with his own kind (Bubis) because they share culture, language, and feelings. He avoids any contact with the Fang because “they are responsible for Bubi extermination” and because he received death threats from members of this ethnicity on grounds of his activism in Spain. He has good relations with Fernandinos and Annobonese. When asked about common grounds with the rest of Equatoguineans ethnic groups, Jorge pointed to the Spanish language in first place, then colonial experience, and Catholicism. On the other hand, there are cultural differences among these groups in rituals, gastronomy, moral and physical features, as well as geographical distance (e.g. between islanders and continent inhabitants). He concludes by saying that there is nothing intrinsic that unites these ethnic groups except for the colonial experience. Regarding Bubi people, they have their loss of identity in common. When asked if he felt Guinean, Jorge’s answer was: “I am Bubi first and last. I am Guinean by legal imposition and I am Spanish only circumstantially”. He sees himself as an exile rather than a migrant; his living in Spain is something artificial. Only by living in Equatorial Guinea he would feel fully achieved. He does not feel Guinean because his condition has brought death and calamities to his family “A country has been set up called Equatorial Guinea, but nobody asked us. It was imposed on us”. He feels he is a Spanish citizen as long

as he is entitled to services such as education or health. To the question “What gives you Spanish and Guinean identity?” the answer was: “the culture and the level of education in both cases”.

## POWER THROUGH LANGUAGE. THE LANGUAGE OF POWER

The second set of questions I would like to analyse here concerns language, more precisely the role played by Spanish in the shaping of these *emixiles*’ identities and by each of the vernacular languages which they associate with their more intimate feeling of pertaining to an ethnic group within the Equatoguinean (diasporic) society. Quilis and Casado-Fresnillo (1995, p. 32) show that Spanish was first imposed through evangelisation, later through contact with settlers and finally through education. During the dictatorship of Macías there was pressure to impose Fang (his native tongue) as the state’s official language and Spanish was prohibited in public and private life.; these impositions led to a level of illiteracy of 63% in 1980 and an impoverishment of Equatoguineans’ competence in Spanish. But in 1982, as a result of the referendum, as put forth in the “*carta de Akonibe*”, Obiang recognized Spanish as the official language as well as aboriginal languages as part of the national culture, as Quilis and Casado-Fresnillo show. They argue that in the nineties, Spanish was rooted and spread in areas historically “Hispanicised”, but not so much in others; that is why schooling represented a primordial factor in its preservation. Quilis and Casado-Fresnillo (1995, p. 34) also warned that French represented a threat, although two decades later, its level of usage was the same, as Chirila (2015, p. 104) concludes. Several surveys were conducted between 1981 and 1993 on 266 informants living in Equatorial Guinea with an average age of 28. These scholars investigated Equatoguinean attitudes towards Spanish. Among the conclusions they reached are the following: the use of Spanish in family relations has increased throughout the studied period; all the surveyed people enjoyed speaking Spanish at will, due to sentimental reasons but also practical reasons (Spanish is a language of prestige); both young generations and those who were adults in Macías’ times found it easier to speak Spanish rather than their mother tongues; almost all the informants considered Spanish a vehicle for culture, a teaching and work language and defined it as “the mother tongue of the Equatorial Guinea state” capable of linking it with the world, symbolising social and technical progress. Quilis and Casado-Fresnillo are surprised to learn that informants refer to their vernacular languages as “*dialects*” (1995, p. 63). Similar conclusions are drawn by Chirila (2015, p. 104), who shows that Equatoguineans find difficulties in communicating in their ancestors’ language and prefer Spanish. Vernacular languages are disappearing among youngsters who think Spanish (and also English – due to globalisation) are able to provide personal achievements. All of them agree they must speak Spanish accurately because of its status and because it is



the means to communicate with the rest of ethnicities in their country. Adolescents prefer Spanish in all contexts: at home, with friends (sporadically they use Pidgin English<sup>7</sup>) and in society/at work. Although French was adopted as the official language in 1998, its use is still limited to business relations with francophone neighbours. As for the diglossia phenomenon, Chirila (2015, p. 105) has found that Spanish is also preferred by Equatoguineans in emotional, affective contexts, while they associate vernacular languages to vulgar, low social levels and small groups. Informants find Spanish a “beautiful and easy” language with which they identify linguistically. Its use is increasing in young generations who regard vernacular languages as an inseparable part of their culture and roots but opt for Spanish as widely spoken on the globe (Chirila, 2015, p. 106).

In what follows, I will try to show that Equatoguinean perceptions towards Spanish as expressed in the aforementioned research, do not differ substantially from the emixiles’ feelings in a diasporic context, which confirms the idea that they perform a kind of transnationalism (in Vertovec’s terms)<sup>8</sup> when dealing with issues related to the motherland from inside the metropolis, more precisely from its margins or “third space” (in Bhabha’s terms), a perverse perimeter: the land of the former colonisers with a language of power that reinforces a pattern of past hegemony transformed into present necessity.<sup>9</sup> Bhabha (1994) explores the nature of cultural difference and defines the “location” of culture as a productive space of liminality containing the spirit of otherness as opposed to the exoticizing concepts of “multiculturalism” or “diversity” bearing underlying forms of control. His third space implies hybridity, a notion that denies traditions based on genealogy or translating the Other. Culture’s hybridity emerges from social marginality, and the strategies of empowerment and articulation are also expected to be found there. Bhabha’s third space eludes the politics of polarity by proposing an “in-between dimension”, a new area for negotiation of meaning. As emixiles, my Equatoguinean interviewees recognize the third space and acknowledge they belong to it, but if they wish to articulate new political initiatives (militancy) or negotiate (redefine) image, they have to do so through the language of power. Going beyond Bhabha’s concept, Soja (1996) widens the scope of “thirdspaces” to encompass (a) the relation between centre and periphery (with its creative spatial consciousness) and (b) the “trialectics of spatiality” (envisaging three dimensions: the space perceived or mapped empirically; the space conceived or represented in mental forms and the space lived or the journeys we make into real-and-imagined places). Thus, according to Soja, “firstplaces” represent the material world, “secondplaces” are imagined representations of reality, and “thirdplaces” are “creative recombinations” of both. In the light of Soja’s ideas, Equatoguinean emixiles’ identity construction (its linguistic component) based on: 1) the language of the oppressor related to their firstplace or former colony; 2) the language of freedom (their mental representation of it) related to their secondplace or former metropolis; 3)

the language of resistance related to the imagological duality (of the way they see themselves and are seen by others).

Although they point to the Spanish territory as the best migrating option, their accounts of the life in exile show a clear preference for vernacular tongues in most cases. The research questions I tried to answer in this second part of my study refer to language, either as *lingua franca* or mother tongue as well as to their feelings towards Spanish and vernacular languages. Thus, in my interview, first I inquired about issues such as the language spoken during childhood versus the language used when socializing with Equatoguineans in Spain. The collected information reveals that while **Emilio**, who is from Corisco, recalls being spoken to in Benga at home, as a child, **Jesús** who is Fang, remembers speaking Fang regularly with his parents in Equatorial Guinea at an early age. The result in the case of Emilio is that he can hesitatingly speak some Benga, although he understands it thoroughly. Nor did Jesús continue speaking Fang, since, as he recalls, during his secondary studies, both in Malabo (at the Claret order private school), and at the public school in Bata, Spanish was the only language spoken. A similar situation is the one experienced by two of my Bubi interviewees, **Viviana** and **Juan**. Viviana remembers using Spanish in 85% of occasions at home, combined with some Pichi (Pidgin English). She acknowledges the power of language, of words and of verbal communication more than written. She considers Africanness, race, and Spanish language to be the shared elements with the rest of ethnic groups in Equatorial Guinea. Juan recalls Spanish being spoken at home during his childhood together with some Bubi. He first studied in a public school in his village, then in the capital at a religious boarding house. As a teenager, he spent several holidays in Spain and the relation with Spaniards was good, or as he puts it, they treated him “con naturalidad” (naturally). Unlike Viviana, he can speak and write Bubi. On the other hand, **Rita**, who is Annobonese, remembers speaking her vernacular language at home, that is Fa-D’Ambó, rooted in Angola, but when visiting Malabo, she spoke Pichi. At school, Spanish was the only language both in elementary, first public education, then religious schools (in Annobon and Malabo), and in high school, which she attended while living in a boarding house for women. A slightly different memory is the one **Jorge** has, who is Bubi and who recalls being punished in elementary school if he spoke Bubi. Nevertheless, this was the language he used at home as a child, but also Spanish, which later became the only language for public communication. As for the second part of this question, the language used when socializing with Equatoguineans in Spain, Jorge shows he has to speak in Spanish because not all of them can speak Bubi or Ndowe. He acknowledges Spanish as being a *lingua franca* for those groups with which he communicates (Bubi, Annobonese, Ferdinandino). He shuns communication with Fang people in Spain because of the extermination policy some members of this ethnic group have carried out in Equatorial Guin-



ea. As Fang, Jesús does communicate with Bubis in Spanish or Pichi, and in Spanish or Fang with his own group, while Rita and Emilio generally opt for Spanish to communicate with Equatoguinean friends.

In order to delve into particular cases of linguistic usage, apart from Spanish as a general option, a key question of this study regards the vernacular language(s) these *emixiles* can speak and the occasions on which they choose to do so. A variety of answers revealed an unbalanced command and if not a preference, at least a tendency to resort to Spanish as a *lingua franca* due to its utility. For instance, **Emilio**, who understands written Bubi, but is more interested in its oral level, recognizes Spanish as inherent to any Equatoguinean by recalling that when he came to Spain, at job interviews he was asked whether he could speak any Spanish: “being an Equatoguinean, it revealed a lack of history knowledge on behalf of employers”, he says. On the other hand, **Rita**, can speak Annobonese and she can also write it. When she came to Spain, she found out that a grammar of her language existed. She uses Annobonese only when meeting very close family members and also on the phone weekly. A brother of hers is translating the Bible into Annobonese. She adds that she is interested in orality, in her linguistic and cultural roots which are Bantu, but she normally speaks Spanish when meeting friends, as well as Emilio, who socialises in Spanish since he needs to communicate with all groups. **Juan** uses Bubi less frequently than he would wish to (orally he uses it with Annobonese or Corisco and Bubi friends), but he is highly interested in grammar and writing, whereas when communicating with members of the Fang, he uses Spanish. **Viviana** opts for Spanish most of the time and for Pichi on occasions, whereas **Jesús** hopes for a revival of vernaculars; he remarked that it was positive that local languages were used on the Equatoguinean TV, thus there was an effort to save them. He used to speak Fang in Spain, but now he seldom does so, only when phoning home to his family. Written Fang is very rare within the community. He admits he would be interested in written materials, if he could access them, but he is more interested in orality. He regrets he cannot transmit Fang language to his children, because they do not live together. **Jorge** shows that in his country, Bubis are forced to learn Fang because they are deprived of rights and equal treatment by civil servants and authorities who belong to that ethnic group and they suffer linguistic discrimination. He can speak and write Bubi, but he rarely uses it, only at family celebrations, since after a long period of prohibition, it is now disappearing. He is interested in Bubi culture and in knowing the history and real facts of these people rather than learning about their literary production.

Once we have seen the reactions of these six *emixiles* towards Spanish as *lingua franca* and towards their own vernacular languages, in order to close the circle of our discussion on the power of language and the language of power, we shall further look into the degree of prestige Spanish language attains in the Equatoguinean society and the reasons why this is so, according to these inter-

viewees. Some of them believe the prestige of Spanish language stands without question. In **Jorge's** opinion, Spanish is the imposed language, the official and the vehicular one, which happens to be a widely spoken language in the world. Other interviewees have differing views. Although she recognises Spanish as a prestigious language, **Rita** cannot help feeling it is an instrument of colonisers as well as the common language to the Guineans. In fact, Rita feels Guinean because it is the country where she was born and educated, and she also feels she is Spanish because of the language she speaks daily, and this is how **Emilio** perceives Spanish too. For him Spanish is a prestigious language because “it defines our lives, since we are born”, an idea that **Juan** qualifies. He thinks that the prestige of the Spanish language decreased after 1990, when English (spoken in Nigeria) and French (spoken in Gambia or Cameroon) were introduced for commercial purposes. French seems to now be the prestigious language in his opinion, since Equatorial Guinea joined the francophone community and the single currency of ten African states, the cefa franc. This perception of Spanish losing its primacy is shared by **Jesús** who feels Spanish language prestige to be diminishing: “it is the language through which we are identified. Equatorial Guinea is the only country in Africa where Spanish is spoken. It should be taught better in Equatorial Guinea. People should acquire a more profound mastery of it”. He also deplores the tendency of Fang language to disappear because young generations cannot speak it anymore, neither in nor out of Equatorial Guinea.

Apart from the interviews with six Equatoguineans in Alicante, I also managed to interview a Spanish former colonial worker who lived there for two years. In fact, he fulfilled his military service in Equatorial Guinea between 1958 and 1960. **Francisco** went on a “scientific ship” to update cartographic information, but as he had been a volunteer at the Red Cross in Alicante, he ended up being trained and then worked as a nurse in Malabo, which turned out to be his lifelong profession. He recalls a relationship of mutual respect between Spaniards and Guineans, although he also noticed that locals seemed to prefer British colonisers who “insufflated the ideas of independence”. The use of Spanish was generalised. It was the natural means for exchanges and daily life. The radio broadcast used to have some sections in vernacular languages, but Spanish was covered most of the time.

As we can see, linguistic identities, perceptions and attitudes do not differ substantially between the conclusions drawn from several studies carried out in the last two decades by means of surveys conducted on large segments of informants in Equatorial Guinea and the results reached in this small research based on in-depth interviews. While there was a low number of informants, they represented the diversity of the area: ethnicities, ages, social positions and personal or ontological narratives. Obviously, care should be taken when attempting extrapolations and generalisations, but this methodological formula, which combines synchronic and diachronic views, has made for telling results.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have explored the role that the Spanish language played in the identity construction of six Equatoguinean emixiles living in the city of Alicante (Spain), as it emerged from their individual life-stories told throughout a guided in-depth interview which revealed valuable information on vernacular languages, as well as on the lingua franca. Also, the linguistic case presented in this study gives some insights on the condition of exile and/or emigration on the part of colonized people with relevant observations on the concept of “third space”.

By comparing perceptions of Equatoguineans towards the Spanish language inside the borders of their country and in their exile-migration status, on a diasporic territory that happens to be the former metropolis, I wanted to determine whether a change occurred or rather the pattern of respect towards a prestigious, opportunity-providing language was reproduced in this “third space” (Bhabha’s term), a space in which the mutual gaze is possible between now and then, here and there.

Based on research previously conducted in Equatorial Guinea by linguists (Quilis and Casado-Fresnillo, Chirila, Lipski, Ngah Elingui, Castillo-Rodríguez) on issues such as diglossia, linguistic identity, and the status of Spanish in comparison to other imperialistic or vernacular languages, my premise was that, given the fact that my six interviewees maintained a tight and engaged connection with their motherland, in many cases getting involved in several kinds of activism (transnationalism), their perceptions and feelings towards the Spanish language would not differ a great deal from those given by their co-nationals from Equatorial Guinea, in spite of the fact that they were living on the former coloniser’s land, which might have provoked rejection towards a language that was imposed on them. As Ugarte foresaw, we are faced with a paradoxical situation in which a language that represents a tool of liberation (providing knowledge and access) but at the same time a device for exerting power, oppressive and repressive, still prevails in Equatoguineans’ consciences as a language of prestige and opportunities, a gate to communicate with the rest of the world, and strangely enough, “the mother tongue of the Equatorial Guinean state” in their own words.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article is a product of the Research and Development project: “African Memories: Reconstructing Spanish Colonial Practices and their Imprint in Morocco and Equatorial Guinea. Towards a Spanish-African Cultural Heritage” HAR2015-63626-P (2016-2018) (MINECO/FEDER, UE), directed by Aixelà-Cabré of the IMF-CSIC (Barcelona).

## NOTES

- 1 The study of image traditionally focuses on five categories: graphic, optical, perceptual, mental and verbal. Leerssen (2007,

344) believes that most images of national character enclose polarities. Image (with its derivations, *imagenes* and *meta-images*) is paramount to imagological studies. Its half-truths (based on historical facts but speculating on convictions) and its diffuse presence in texts, subadjacent to public narratives and political discourse, makes it one of the most powerful and everlasting devices of the language of power.

- 2 They further differentiate between “ethnonymes” (racial slurs to refer for instance to Afro-Americans in USA) and “endonyms” (slurs used by blacks to refer to themselves – an interiorised position as target group) as two manners to convey racist language (2014, p. 237).
- 3 Defined by Doorslaer et al. (2015) as “ingrained discursive tropes not based on empirical observation”. Leerssen (2016), defines ethnotypes as a stereotypical attribution of national, supra-national or ethnic characterization, responding not to an anthropological reality, but to an opposition between the Self and the Other. The ethnotype is fostered in times of tension and smoothed in stability epochs as it happens with prejudices and stereotypes. It uses rhetorical formulae and moral tropes and is based on opposite behavioural profiles (temperamental patterns or psychological predispositions) drawn not from historical features, but from constructed images and counter-images. The danger of ethnotypes is their ontological half-life, their diluted presence in discourse and their power to replace other frames we might have on a nation, Leerssen warns.
- 4 Jesús, age 47, born in Ayene, arrival to Spain 1999, social class in Spain: low. Interviewed on 18th January 2014, in Alicante.  
Jorge, age 61, born in Basakato, arrival to Spain 1969, social class: middle. Interviewed several times between 26th January and 28th February 2013 in Alicante.  
Rita, age 60, born in Annobon, arrival to Spain 1998, social class: low. Interviewed several times between 21st April 2013 and 30th January 2014 in Alicante.  
Emilio, age 71, born in Corisco, arrival to Spain 1960, social class: low. Interviewed several times between 18 June and 30th November 2013 in Alicante.  
Juan, age 67, born in Basakato, arrival to Spain 1966, social class: high. Interviewed several times between 19th June 2013 and 28th January 2014 in Alicante.  
Viviana, age 49, born in Malabo, arrival to Spain 1982, social class: middle. Interviewed several times between 24th January and 15th April 2014 in Alicante.  
Francisco, age 75, born in Alicante, lived in Equatorial Guinea for two years (1958-1960), profession: nurse in public health care, social class: middle.
- 5 Other questions of this interview have been used in a previous study (Iliescu Gheorghiu and Bosaho, 2018). It contains over 100 questions and it is structured in three sections dealing with: (1) paternal and maternal family history (22 questions); (2) relatives, youth, studies (15 questions); and (3) job, social networking, matrimony, exile/migration (73 questions). All the interviewees have been renamed. They are of both sex, different age and social status and they possess extensive family networks in Spain, as well as close relatives in Equatorial Guinea. For all of them Spain was the first and only migration destination.
- 6 *Organización de Juventudes de España*, a youth organisation under Franco’s regime.
- 7 Starting from 1939 there were attempts to eradicate the creole English spoken in Guinean shore regions, also called “spikin inglés” or “pichi”, the usage of which was widespread on the island. Álvarez, who was a school inspector and head of the fascist paper “Ebano” (Ebony), was very harsh on settlers who used it or allowed indigenous workers to use it, urging them to use exclusively Spanish, as Chillida and Martín (2013, p. 420) show.
- 8 In this paper I use the term “transnational” in Vertovec’s acceptance (2009, p. 3), referring to dual activism (geographically distant but politically homeland-oriented) and explained in the following terms:  
When referring to sustained linkages and ongoing exchanges among non-state actors based across national borders – business, non-governmental organisations and individuals sharing the same

interests (by way of criteria such as religious beliefs, common cultural and geographic origins) – we can differentiate these as “transnational” practices and groups (referring to their links functioning across nation-states). The collective attributes of such connections, their process of formation and maintenance and their wider implications are referred to broadly as “transnationalism”.

- 9 Bhabha (1994) coined the term “Third space” to describe arenas where cultural and social differences can be negotiated and complex identities created, although no space can be totally free from power controlling discourses.

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